

THE

Pam 77

Prodigious Appearance

OF

4371. b. 31

DEISM

In this AGE,

Modestly Accounted for in a

LETTER

FROM

A Deist to his Friend.

Quod videri vis esto.

L O N D O N :

Printed in the Year 1710.



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Honest Tim.

THOU hast often importun'd me to give thee some reasonable Satisfaction concerning the Principles of Natural Religion, and as it were, put me to open Deference, to vindicate my Apostasie (as thou call'st it) which I glory in, and am peremptorily resolved to maintain, as far as Sense and Reason will allow me. Tho' I do not pretend to Infallibility, yet, till I have greater and more convincing Evidence to support the Truth of Christianity than I presume I can produce against it, I will preserve my self fixt in that State of Reason and Nature wherein I was created, and will never lay a Clog upon my Neck in direct

Opposition to the just Will and Design of my Creator. I do not question but thou wilt condemn me as perverse and obstinate, as one wilfully prejudiced against, and impatient of Conviction. To remove therefore, or at least qualifie these severe Imputations, I will briefly insist upon some Particulars, which at first induced me to shake Hands with your Dispensation, and restored me to that Natural lovely Freedom which I now enjoy. Thou art sensible that I was no way byass'd with Passion or Education, and that I had no private Interest to allure me; nay, thou knowest what Crosses and Disappointments I immediately engaged, when I broke the Chains of Christianity which continually gall'd me for so many long Years: And therefore I presume thou wilt have the Faith to believe what I say, and be so impartial as to judge of what I have done, as the sole Result of Reasoning and Reflection.

I need not tell thee, that Unity is an Essential Note of your whole Church, and consequently of the Church of *England*, as being a Member of the Universal Body of Christians: Now as far as my Judgment will reach, wherever this Ingredient is wanting, the whole Composition presently falls into Convulsions, and betrays such a Weakness and Inconsistency, that a Man cannot, without forfeiting his Reason, be so infatuated, as to shelter under a Dispensation so monstrous and self-contradicting. 'Twill be no great difficulty to apply this, since it is very notorious, that there is not a Constitution upon the Face of the Earth so distracted with Rents and Divisions as the Church of *England*; yet forsooth, she must still be a true Church, her Faith and Baptism must be one, when two parts of the

the whole Kingdom profess a different Creed, and were never enter'd into your Society according to to the Canons of your Church. If this be not plain Nonsense and Inconsistency, I will immediately tack about to my old Principles, and pass under the Yoke.

After all this, 'tis but Self-evidence, that but one Party can possibly be in the Right; yet how zealous is every Sect to support its own Notions, be they never so contrary to Reason, or your Revelation. What Tricks and Subterfuges are made use of, how grossly is your Scripture, the Standard of your Faith and Manners perverted, to justify and varnish o'er the servile Passions and Interests of dangerous and designing Men, who make their Religion truckle to Money and Preferment, and prostitute the Word of your God to palliate the basest and most enormous Pretences. Is not this sufficient to raise the Spleen of any Moral Man, and bring the whole Profession in Dispute? Who can chuse but sling about him, and shake off his Chains, when he finds the most severe Professors of his Religion glibly digest the worst and rankest Hypocrisie, under pretence of doing God Service? a Pretence that would force a Blush from one who never had had Revelations to guide him. If thou wilt believe me, *Tim*, a serious Reflection upon these things have made Men fly in the very Face of Christianity, and sweat at the Thoughts of it; for my own part, I can satisfy thee by Experience; for when I cast my Thoughts upon the state of Affairs that immediately preceded and succeeded the Sufferings of the Blessed *Charles the First*, when I consider'd the debauched and lewd Practices that went under the

Cloak and Countenance of your Religion, when not only the most ridiculous Follies, but the Malice, Pride, Passion, and Rancour of the hottest Saints were father'd upon the Son and Spirit of your God, that Men had recourse to God for all the Villanies they were resolv'd to commit, that they made long Prayers to devour Widows Houses, and proclaimed a Fast to kill and take Possession: In short, when I found Christianity prostituted to the basest Purposes, and the most specious Profession was a shelter for the vilest Knavery, I summoned all my Reason to account for these amazing and stupendious Contradictions; but I found them not to be accounted for, especially when I compared the Honesty and pretended Simplicity of your Religion, with the Tricks and Doublings of the Professors of it; so I immediately turned Sceptick upon the Point, and concluded that 'twas all the Effect of Bigotted Superstition, Cheat and Delusion. When I consider'd that the same Leaven of Hypocrisie is still working in this Age, that it openly stalks about under the plausible Covert of Piety and Devotion, and will infallibly introduce the same Anarchy and Confusion that is yet unatoned for, I was more confirmed in my Resolutions, and fixt my Principles according to the Light of Nature at a remoter distance from the gloomy Rays of your Gospel.

Would not any Man, that pretends to Reason, and the use of it, turn his Back upon Christianity, when he reflects upon the morose and uncharitable Temper that notoriously appears in its Professors? It was the Confession of an eminent Divine now in your Church, that he thinks it no mighty attainment to be able in Writing, to manage a Contro-
verse

verſie coolly and ſedately, without bitter or provoking Reflections, or contemptuous Expreſſions; and further, That though Men of warm Tempers may find it ſomewhat difficult to govern their Spirits and Paſſions, as it becomes them in the head of Diſputing by word of Mouth, one would think that a ſmall meaſure of Humility, or good Nature, or of Diſcretion and Prudence, would make it no hard Matter to acquire that other Attainment; and much more, that no one who is a Chriſtian in Spirit and Temper, as well as in Notion and Profeſſion, can find it a difficult Matter to arrive at it. However, when notwithstanding I found with what inveterate Spite and Malice your ſeveral Parties proſecute one another, what odious and bitter Invectives and defamatory Libels they write one-againſt another, wherein all the ſecret Follies of each Party are openly blazed and publiſhed, all the Errors aggravated, all the Opinions racked and tortured, to charge Folly, Blaſphemy, and Nonſenſe upon each other reciprocally, one Party accuſed for pulling down your Church, by voting her out of Danger; another cenſured for Sedition, for ſtanding up in her Defence, one ſide condemn'd for Popery, the other for Rebellion; I ſay, when I ſeriously turn'd my Thoughts upon theſe Things, I concluded from their Impeachments and mutual Conceſſions, that both Sides were equally Guilty, and that, ſince they always pretended to act upon Chriſtian Principles, their Diſpenſation was nothing but an intricate and perplexed Maze, of abſurd and contrary Notions; and how could I otherwiſe conclude, when ſuch monſtrous and ridiculous Practices reſulted from it?

What Thoughts must a Man entertain of your Christian Ecopomy, when he considers, that the most August Mystery of your holy Religion, the Lord's Supper (as you call it) is legally allowed to be prostituted to the Interests of ambitious Statesmen, and blasphemed by the Countenance of publick Authority? Nay, many of your Bishops who (according to my Apprehensions) were commissioned by their great Master, to guard that venerable Institution from Contumely and Prophanation, very violently engaged to render it common and contemptible; and by this means thought to express their Zeal for their Country and Religion; and a very cordial one in my Judgment, to accomplish the Subversion of both. What can any Man think of one who tells him that he cannot in Conscience join in the establish'd Liturgy of your Church, for fear of being profaned, of committing of Idolatry, and falling into Superstition; yet he will upon some particular emergent Occasions, (when he apprehends his Presence there, and the receiving the Body of his Redeemer will be any way beneficial to him) force himself to join in the Common Service of your Church, and communicate according to her Institution? What incoherent Nonsense is here! What knavish Shifting and Doubling is such a Man guilty of! He is afraid of receiving the Elements upon his Knees, for fear of Idolatry; but when? only when he cannot get Votes enough to secure his Interest in the State. This is your Occasional Conformist, a Man of Probity and simple Honesty, whose Religion depends only upon the Breath of a few ignorant Mechanicks, who can vote him to come to Church whenever they please. What Opinion thou hast of him I cannot tell; but for my own part, I profess solemnly

solemnly with the honest *Indian*, that were I sure to enjoy the greatest Beatitudes of Heaven along with him, I would willingly forego them all to avoid his Company.

The notorious Indifference (if it deserves so favourable an Appellation) which I perceive amongst many Prelates of your Church, towards the Support of your Ecclesiastical Constitution, have engaged me to conclude their Religion to be precarious, and may be blown in and out at their Pleasure. No Man I presume, who can be supposed to wish well to your Establishment, would appear immoderately zealous for the Interests of those whose Business and Design is under the plausible Covert of Christianity, to triumph upon the Ruines of your Church and State. To speak plainly, who would expect so many Lights of your Church express such a cordial Approbation towards the Conduct of your Protestant Dissenters, Persons that have blown up the whole Kingdom into a Flame, and laid it in Ashes? For my part, I have been amazed to hear them cajole those of your Separation, by vindicating the Licence they have procured them in direct Opposition to the Hierarchy and Episcopal Ministry of your Church, whilst at the same time your Constitution lies bleeding of the Wounds that this Indulgence hath made in her very Bowels. Nay, I profess solemnly, they seem to shew as great (I was going to say greater) Resolution in the defence of this Exemption, as they express towards the support of the Church, which I presume they have greater Obligation to defend. How can any Man digest such amazing Contradictions as these? either your Bishops thought Toleration for the good of your Constitution, or they did not; if

if they did, in my Opinion, they judg'd by Contraries, since they might easily be sensible in a few hours Reading, or Consideration, that such Ministers should rather be suppress'd than indulg'd, especially when they have always proved to be a headstrong and growing Mischief, of such loose and debauch'd Principles, that no Establishment Civil or Sacred can possibly subsist, when these Plagues are legally shelter'd under its Protection: If they did not, it is the more unaccountable, that they should so unanimously consent to establish that almost as one of the Liberties of the Subject, which they were sensible would undermine the whole Foundation of your Church: But that which still increases my Amazement, is to find them continually upon all Occasions consulting to afford their Profess'd Enemies, the greatest Protection and Encouragement imaginable: Within my Memory they projected to dilate and expand the Communion of your Church, and adapt her Liturgy to the nice Digestion of your formal sturdy Separatists. But I think they betray'd a great deal of Weakness in the Adventure; for can any Man think that Persons of such insatiable Ambition could have been easie and satisfied only upon the Omission of a few indifferent Punctilio's? No certainly, for if they appear restless, and heaving under a Toleration, a Comprehension would have proved very insignificant to keep them in Communion with your Church. I tell thee, *Tim*, they insensibly steal in upon your Constitution, and by such plausible Gradations will at last jostle you out of all. I would have thee reflect seriously upon these things, and I am perswaded thou wilt entertain a very wavering Opinion of a Religion that harbours such a monstrous and contradicting Notion, as a Bishop against the Church.

I have often heard that Charity was a necessary Ingredient, and almost essential to the Frame of your Religion; but where is it to be found? not in your Prelates, who betray a Temper in their Conduct very inconsistent with that Charity they ought to recommend by their Example. If they ought ever to moderate their Style, and act according to the Principles of their Profession, I presume they should discover their Moderation towards those of their own Function, the Ministers of your Church, whenever they were so unhappy as to fall under their Censure: But instead of this Christian Prudence, they appear immoderately hot and heady, making use of all Advantages, rapping and rending for Arguments and Invectives, purposely as it were to traduce Shame and Contumely upon their own Order to all Posterity; a Conduct very inconsistent with the Moderation that some of them profess. Nay, they are so immoderately violent, as to run into Extremes, into Contradictions and Absurdities, as to betray such Malice, (for thou wilt not allow me to call it Ignorance) that a Man who pretends to common Learning and Ingenuity would blush to be guilty of. What shall I say then of that irreconcilable distance in Opinion, at least that they keep up between themselves, of that sturdy Temper which is so predominant in them, that they will not recede one Point from their own adored Notions, though the Peace, Unity, and the very Being of your Church lie at Stake? Infomuch, that a vigilant Enemy intent upon his Opportunity, might easily bolt in upon your Constitution, whilst the Strength of those who should support it is mutually weaken'd and divided. 'Tis no wonder, in my Judgment, that Dissentions are fomented in the Flock, when

when the Shepherds act upon contrary Principles. *Tim*, lay thy Hand upon thy Breast, and do not charge me with Apostasie, Rashness and Folly.

Since I have insisted somewhat particularly upon the Conduct of your Bishops, I cannot omit one Circumstance, which gave great Satisfaction and Encouragement, and did not a little advance me into that state of Nature, Liberty and Reason which I am now possess'd of. I once had a great Veneration for the Censures of your Church, and at first was very tender and cautious of receding from your Revealed Religion, for fear of exposing my self to the stroak of her Discipline, which I conceived to be very dreadful and terrible; but I quickly came to my self, and after some Reflection found the Power of the Keys, to be a meer Nominal Authority, lodg'd in the Hands of your Bishops and their Proctors, like an artificial Thunder-bolt to frighten the Commonalty into a blind Obedience and Submission. So I push'd forward, and at last arriv'd in that Harbour wherein I am at present instated. For I could not force my self to think that your Discipline was any more than a Fiction, since the Execution of it was omitted, upon which I apprehended the very Being of your Church did depend; whether I was deceiv'd in my Determination I leave thee to judge; But upon supposition that your Bishops are actually commissioned with such an Authority, and that the seasonable and regular execution of it will (as I am sure it would) secure the Peace and Unity of your Church, I presume it is indifferent whether She stands or falls, when such easie and necessary Means are wholly omitted to Support Her.

To

To Summ up all (for I am sensible thy Patience is almost expir'd) when I observ'd the Behaviour of your Inferiour Clergy, to be fundamentally opposite to the Principles of their Religion, when I perceiv'd that they chang'd and turn'd about their Principles according to their Interests, that they courted and flatter'd notorious Phanaticks, in prospect of secular Advancement, that they swore to stand up in the defence of your sacred Constitution, yet vigorously united with the profest Enemies of your Church: In short, when I observ'd such Trimming and Volubility in their Principles and Practices, that I was confident could not be reconciled with the Courage and Constancy they would insinuate to be the Doctrines of Christianity, I concluded your Dispensation to be supported by the same Policy that invented it, and to be nothing but the Result of Bigottry and Enthusiasm.

These are the chief Reasons I can produce to vindicate my seperation from your Church, but if thou art yet unsatisfi'd, I will add, that I presume the whole Body of your Church and State, would never allow a Liberty of Conscience, if Salvation were not to be attain'd by the Profession of Natural as well as Reveal'd Religion.

I am, *Tim,*

your Affectionate Friend]

and Servant

E. D.

